DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 897 PS 022 709

AUTHOR Karr, Jo Ann
TITLE Getting Professional: Preparing To Work with Young Children.
PUB DATE 18 Jun 94
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Credits; College Students; College Transfer Students; *Educational Attitudes; Elementary Education; Higher Education; *Student Attitudes; Teacher Education; Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Employment; *Teacher Role; *Teaching (Occupation)

ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the concerns of college students and graduates regarding the teaching profession, and reviews the experiences of a former teacher who is now a university professor of education. The problem of credit transfer between community college and university programs is examined, along with the job market for new teachers. Prospective teachers need to maintain good grades, engage in leadership and volunteer activities, take part in professional organizations, and develop a marketable specialty. Prospective teachers should not avoid big-city schools when seeking employment, despite the substandard conditions and poor schools in some areas. Many effective, though largely unpublicized, schools and programs exist in the inner cities. The contributions that a dedicated teacher can make in a school with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, even with limited resources, are significant and highly rewarding. (MDM)

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Name: Jo Ann Karr, Ed.D.
Position: Assistant Professor
Place: Northeastern Illinois University
Department of Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
5500 N. St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60625-4699

Previous Experience Relative to Article:

Classroom Teacher from 1986 to 1990 in Chicago Public Schools. I was trained in school site management for two years, Project CANAL. This project supported curriculum restructuring. During this time I was school site evaluator as a member of core planning team at Lowell Elementary School. I have conducted workshops and served as consultant for other schools using shared governance models since I have been at the University.

GETTING PROFESSIONAL
"PREPARING TO WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN"

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McDONALD UNIVERSITY
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JUNE 18, 1994

GETTING PROFESSIONAL
"PREPARING TO WORK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN"

By: Dr. Jo Ann Karr

I am honored to be invited to the Future Teachers Retreat, "Building Blocks of Education". Congratulations to those of you who received your Associate Degrees this spring, and to those still striving toward this goal. Keep up the good work!

Ms. Banks, a kindergarten teacher at Mozart School, Chicago Board of Education, has described many rich experiences she has had in the classroom. I remember her as a student in my methods class at National-Louis University; eager, ready to get all the information about how to teach children. Now, light years later, she is still engaged in professional development, going to workshops, writing grants, attending local school council meetings and exerting leadership in her building today. Her university education, began at National-Louis, has been strengthened and extended by her collaboration with Northeastern Illinois University and other colleges. I can take pride in her accomplishments in education and feel the reciprocal learning between us. When I discovered she was in my university's project school, I was delighted to see she had blended that early knowledge and energy into a delightful kindergarten. Many of your questions about how best to prepare yourself for teaching can be answered through looking at the experiences of Ms. Banks and other active, reflective teachers.

Many of you have expressed concern about credit transfer into a university education program. Indeed, there is some room for the universities to better communicate with your advisors at the community colleges and that is in progress. However, for the graduates entering a university in the fall, let me assure you that the faculty acknowledges the foundation you have built through course work and practicums and being active in the Future Teachers' Club at the community colleges. We may ask you to take another child development or methods course. Theory and research behind the classroom practices will be explored to help you make selection decisions about curriculum and meet the needs of your classroom. As educators we want to embrace diversity and at the same time prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. You will need to be familiar with a large array of strategies and be able to mix and match them to changing needs, supporting your decisions with a sound rationale.

I am often asked about the job market for new teachers. Reports of layoffs or building closings causes some to worry that their career in teaching will be cut short or will not be able to get started. It is my contention that thoughtful attention to developing a rich portfolio of teacher participation activities will guarantee that your resume will be on top of the applicant pile. Beyond a good G.P.A. on your university transcript, the principals and school boards are looking for the special emphasis such as telecommunication, whole language, emergent literacy, science and math, leadership activities in a student chapter of a professional organization, and volunteer and service activities with challenged learners. Students can use college courses as a bridge or a starting point and take the opportunity to read about the topics, interview teachers and even try their hand at using the strategies with a small group of children. Even now as a Future Teacher Club Member, file pictures, programs, and descriptions of your education-related activities. As you enter the professional sequence at the university, dialogue with professors and advisors about how best to shape your interest into a marketable specialty, sharing your file with them.

Another question raised was about teaching in a large city school. Yes, I too have read and heard so many sad tales about the city schools. Unfortunately, too many of the stories are true. However, all too often you don't hear about the many effective teacher teams turning their schools around. Through reform initiative, teachers, parents and principals have created new and exciting environments for children's learning. In Ms. Banks' school, Mozart, a teacher team and a Northeastern Illinois University professor, Dr. Landerholm, proposed a gardening project. They found a vacant lot, a neighbor with a water outlet, and free agriculture service that brings boards to frame plots, soil to go into it and technical help. They were awarded $5,000 by a Foundation because they showed the connection with the science, math, reading and writing curriculum in the gardening activities. The middle school children mixed the fertilizer into the soil, leveled the ground for the younger children's planting of vegetables and flowers. Students who may be prone to miss school are coming to school so they can garden.

While this school is located in a low socio-economic neighborhood and the achievement test scores are below level, the climate for learning has been developed for change to take place. As a student in a university's education program, you can get involved in this school or another "Star School." Bringing in your new and creative ideas to these receptive classroom teachers is encouraged. Often, principals offer you a job right after student teaching based on your contributions to the school.

What is a "Star School"? It is that organization that allows you to use thoughtful, professional decision-making. I have heard of the activities you have done as Future Teacher Club Members. You have a philosophy, a belief system, about how you want to

interact with children. In a Star School, you are allowed to try out, explore and reach out to bring the best practices into the classroom. And yes, there are many Star Schools in large cities! Let me share my experience in such a school.

After many years as a university education professor, I decided I needed to go back into the elementary classroom to experience first hand what worked and what didn't work. I applied at the Chicago Board of Education's Central Office and I was sent to a Hispanic school in Humboldt Park on the west side of Chicago. The Central Office gave the principal no choice but to take me to fill the 5/6th grade vacancy. I was given a room with category A, no English, Category B, children with limited English, and Category C, children needing some help with English. I'm a reading specialist and have extensive work in helping children with educational needs <u>but</u> I don't speak Spanish! I used peer tutors, cooperative groups and every trick I could think of. Since it was November, and these children were pulled from other rooms, there were few supplies left for my room. The newest texts were already given out, so we were given the older edition. My friends loaded me up with garage sale books, recyclable computer paper and other material. The system had not provided us with many things we needed, but we compensated and had a very successful year. We had more science fair entries than any other room, among other accomplishments.

The principal allowed me to use the strategies I felt worked with the children. He removed as many administrative barriers as possible. Teacher aides assisted me in communicating with non-English speaking parents, parents helped sew costumes for plays and the other teachers did not pressure me into doing the curriculum the way they were doing it. This Star School had all the ingredients to make changes needed to meet the complex problems when teachers empower themselves with knowledge of effective practices and professional development.

Perhaps in your teaching career, you will work in an entire system that has financial backing and prestige to move forward. As an aside, I want to pass around money from Ghana. You'll notice on each denomination, there is a picture of the nations' resources; gold, diamonds, cocoa plants. And then on the 200 cedis note there is a classroom scene of children and teachers engaged in learning. This suggests that indeed education has an important place in the country's development.

While touring Ghanian schools this past May, I was inspired by the seriousness both teachers and students bring to the classroom. While the resources were scant, the enthusiasm for learning was high. Now my imagination carries me to envision these same children and teachers with the educational materials they need. What a wonder of potential inventions, medical cures, environmental problem solutions might result in the numbers needed for our expanding world population.

As future teachers, you can provide these building blocks that will empower yourselves, your students and the community - locally and globally! To achieve this within whatever school environment you are placed in, network with other students of education, attach with a field teacher or a mentor, experience first hand the theory and innovative practices described in the college classrooms <u>even</u> when not required. Affiliate with a professional educators' organization now and become active.